

Rio 2016

Managing risk in the Olympic Games

A VIEW BY JORGE LUZZI

In recent years, excitement in Brazil has been running high, partly because of it hosting the world's biggest football tournament, but also due to the growing anticipation of new events to come. While Brazilians' traditional good humour, cheerfulness and optimism may have been shaken by political upheavals over the last two years, the prospect of a new 'mega' event, universal in its scope, is getting hearts racing again. The events in question are the Olympic Games, running from 5-21 August 2016, and the Paralympic Games, taking place from 7-18 September. **Jorge Luzzi**, President of Herco Global and Director of Risk Management at Brokerslink, outlines how the host nation is preparing for these global sporting events from a risk management perspective.

The opening and closing ceremonies will be held in the historic and majestic Maracanã Stadium. Here, athletes will compete in 28 sports, two more than at the 2012 London Olympics (the International Olympic Committee decided to add golf and rugby sevens). There are four Olympic zones; Barra, Copacabana, Deodoro and Maracanã.

When Rio de Janeiro was chosen to host the Olympic and Paralympic Games, Brazil was faced with the challenge of organising two of the biggest sporting events on the planet, with an interval of just two years between them - the Football World Cup in 2014 and the Olympic and Paralympic Games in 2016.

For the Football World Cup, there were huge infrastructure, logistical and security issues to overcome. The stadiums where the matches were to be held were scattered geographically and the challenges were compounded by the sheer physical vastness of the country. A risk management strategy, taking into account transport infrastructure, physical structures, logistics and the security of visitors and teams while travelling, ensured risk mitigation measures could be implemented, reducing or almost eliminating the risks associated with the event. From an organisational viewpoint, this was a success.

The venues for the Olympics' 28 sports are spread across various facilities in Rio de Janeiro, a city that by Brazilian standards is relatively small. This means the risk issues posed by a wide geographical spread are reduced. Football matches however, will be held in the cities of Belo Horizonte, Brasilia, Salvador and São Paulo and, of course, in the legendary Maracanã Stadium. The 2016 Rio Olympic Committee therefore has high hopes for this event, partly because of the reduced geographical risk and also because of the experience already gained in handling events of this magnitude.

Also featured on the 2016 Rio Olympic Committee's 'risk map' are issues related to health and the host city's hotel capacity.

Where health is concerned, the Zika virus is clearly a worry. The epidemic affecting Brazil has been rapidly addressed by the healthcare authorities of the state of Rio de Janeiro and the Federal Government, as well as by the Olympic Committee. In order to reduce or even halt the virus's development, the Brazilian army has been mobilised with large numbers of military personnel locating the mosquitoes' breeding areas and treating them with larvicide. Luckily, when the Olympic Games take place,

it will be winter in the southern hemisphere, so the tropical rains that normally foster the proliferation of mosquitoes are very unlikely to occur at that time.

In order to address any health concerns visitors may have, new, large and well-equipped private hospitals have been built close to the Olympic Village and the stadiums.

As far as crowd control is concerned, studies indicate that international supporters of the Olympic Games are likely to be less volatile than those who attended the Football World Cup. Taking into account experiences gained during the tournament, and as long as the sporting authorities work in similar fashion, there should be no major difficulties during this year's events.

Rio de Janeiro's hotel infrastructure will not pose a problem since Rio is a city accustomed to receiving large numbers of tourists and has a huge range of hotels, both in terms of star ratings and price.

Another risk that must be considered is terrorism. Although Brazil is not normally a target country for terrorist attacks, various initiatives are being undertaken to mitigate this risk. These include tighter border controls and stricter individual searches (since some of the foreign delegations may be targeted by terrorists). This risk is being assessed jointly by the Brazilian Olympic Committee and the Olympic authorities of the countries considered potential targets for attacks.

Unfortunately, Guanabara Bay will not be decontaminated in time for the Games. This is regrettable, since it would clearly be of huge benefit for the competition and the city itself, given that almost 1,400 competitors will be sailing on the waters of the Marina da Glória, in Guanabara Bay, swimming from Copacabana Beach, and canoeing and rowing on the waters of Rodrigo de Freitas Lagoon.

The stadium infrastructures, while not yet finished, pose no major problems and will be of the standard required for competitions of this level, as will the Olympic Village itself.

As with any large-scale human activity, there are risks – in differing places and occurring at differing times. But the Olympics are universal and of great importance to mankind, when sport brings us all together as one. As the legendary chairman of the International Olympic Committee, Baron Pierre de Coubertin said: "... may the Olympic Torch pursue its way through the ages for the good of a humanity always more enthusiastic, more courageous and more pure."

Risk has and will always exist. However big or small, it is a consequence of the times in which we live. In Brazil, many people are working to ensure that, under no circumstances, will this 'celebration of mankind and humanity' be jeopardised, and that the Olympic Games can continue to be celebrated as the greatest sporting spectacle in the world.

These will be the first Olympic Games to be held in South America, the second in Latin America (Mexico City 1968) and the third in the southern hemisphere (Melbourne 1956 and Sydney 2000). •



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